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RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 4896
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 2142
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 2223
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 3262
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4337
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 4779
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 9369
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 000083

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/11/2017
TAGS: [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BL](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH COCHABAMBA PREFECT REGARDING
DISTURBANCES

REF: A. LA PAZ 54

[1](#)B. LA PAZ 75

Classified By: Amb. Philip S. Goldberg for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Cochabamba Prefect Manfred Reyes Villa met with the Ambassador January 11 to discuss orchestrated political violence occurring in Cochabamba. Reyes told the Ambassador he would not resign from the governorship and expressed his strong concerns about the state of Bolivian democracy, saying the current situation is worse than October 2003 and warning that civil conflict cannot be ruled out. The Ambassador told Reyes that the USG is watching the situation in Cochabamba closely and that it supports a peaceful outcome. Reyes is in the middle of the maelstrom and may have emphasized some points to arouse U.S. support; nevertheless, we believe his warnings have validity, as shown by disturbances in Cochabamba during the afternoon of January 11 that have left one dead and over seventy injured. End summary.

MEETING WITH COCHABAMBA PREFECT MANFRED REYES VILLA

[1](#)2. (C) Cochabamba Prefect (governor) Manfred Reyes Villa requested a meeting with the Ambassador on January 11 to discuss the political violence occurring in Cochabamba. Reyes said he had traveled to La Paz on the morning of January 11 to attend a meeting of opposition prefects (six of the nine Bolivian departments). Violence erupted in Cochabamba on January 8 when MAS affiliated protesters demanding Reyes' resignation burned the Cochabamba prefecture offices, torched cars, and looted offices and shops. Violent conflicts continue as of January 11 as pro-Reyes groups take to the streets to confront MAS protesters. (Reftels).

[1](#)3. (C) Reyes said the GOB continues to orchestrate and incite mob violence against him and would use any deaths as an excuse to totally clamp down. (As of the afternoon of January 11, clashed between pro-Reyes and pro-MAS protesters has left one dead, apparently a cocalero supporter of Evo Morales). The prefect said Minister of the Presidency de la

Quintana came to Cochabamba the morning of January 10 to "negotiate" a stop. Reyes complained that de la Quintana did not call him until 3:30 p.m. and asked him to meet in an insecure location close to the protests. Reyes said he accepted the meeting to avoid looking like he was unwilling to talk. During the meeting, de la Quintana reportedly demanded that Reyes suspend his call for a referendum on autonomy, calling it illegal. Reyes replied the referendum initiative was a citizen's initiative; he did not control it.

In any event, he said he would not back down and would respect the law. At that point Reyes' security team alerted him that a group of protesters was marching toward the location and advised him to leave. De la Quintana promised to call Reyes within two hours but never did. Reyes feels he was set up and that de la Quintana is personally overseeing the MAS protests instead of trying to end the conflict.

¶4. (C) Reyes told the Ambassador that Cochabamba is a key department, as it straddles both eastern and western Bolivia.

He opposes President Morales' plan to send presidential delegates to each department as the GOB's way of creating parallel governors. Reyes also said a Bolivian Air Force source who was traveling with President Morales and Vice President Garcia Linera heard Morales say to the VP, when the VP suggested they be more flexible, that there was no need, as Morales had spoken with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, who assured Morales that "everything would be fine."

¶5. (C) The prefect said he had a message for the USG: "democracy is at risk in Bolivia." Reyes said the current situation is worse than October 2003 and warned that civil conflict cannot be ruled out. He said he is fearful that Venezuela will send troops and asked what the USG would do in such a case. The Ambassador responded that the USG supports

democracy and believes problems should be resolved peacefully. The Ambassador assured Reyes that Venezuelan military intervention would change the situation. He noted, however, that press coverage indicates that the opposition prefects are in a strong position and enjoy public sympathy. Reyes replied that the prefects are fighting the battle and plan to call for a nationwide referendum on autonomy.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) We believe that Prefect Reyes, himself in the middle of the maelstrom, used the meeting to try to arouse greater U.S. interest and support as much as to inform of the current situation. That being said, we believe his warnings have a great deal of validity, as shown by disturbances in Cochabamba during the afternoon of January 11 that have left one dead and over seventy injured. End Comment.

GOLDBERG